

## **CHINA'S ECOLABELING PROGRAM**

### **Introduction**

In May 1994, the Chinese government established the China Certification Committee for Environmental Labeling Products (CCEL) to administer a third-party certification program under the direction of the China State Bureau of Technology Supervision (CSBTS) and the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA). The establishment of CCEL was prompted by several factors, including the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, after which the Chinese government declared environmental stewardship a high priority. Trade issues also influenced the government's decision to establish a national environmental labeling program since some exports, such as refrigerators and wallpaper, had been adversely affected in the international market by the lack of such a product certification program. In fact, some provinces and domestic manufacturers had already designed their own labeling programs to address these issues.

The purpose of China's environmental labeling program is to "reduce domestic environmental stress of products by using market forces as a means to supplement mandatory environmental laws." In addition, the program strives to increase public awareness of the environmental impact of consumer products, and to promote the trade of environmentally preferable products.

### **Program Summary**

CCEL, chaired by the Administrator of NEPA, consists of 16 government officials and eight members from various professional disciplines and stakeholder groups including environmental science, economics, quality standards organizations, consumer associations, and environmentalists. Its role is to define and administer the policy, principles, and rules of the environmental labeling program. CCEL reports to CSBTS and NEPA, and relies on a small Secretariat, seated in NEPA, to handle the day-to-day activities of the program.

China's environmental certification process begins with proposals for product categories, which may be submitted to the Secretariat by any interested party. The Secretariat reviews the proposed product category and submits its recommendations to CCEL, which then accepts or rejects the proposal. This decision is finalized only after approval by both NEPA and CSBTS.

Once a new product category is approved, the Secretariat delegates the task of drafting the new product criteria to a private standard-setting organization. This draft is edited by the Secretariat through a multi-party consultation process involving relevant experts and manufacturers. These criteria are then submitted to NEPA for approval and release to the public.

Manufacturers may then apply for product certification. To be eligible, manufacturers must be legally registered with the appropriate government agency, meet all applicable product quality standards, satisfy national and local pollution emission requirements, and must not have been fined or punished by the national or local environmental protection agency for one year prior to the application submission.

Eligible manufacturers begin the certification process by submitting an application to their local Environmental Protection Agency. The agency conducts a preliminary review of the product and submits its findings along with the original application to CCEL. A CCEL inspection team then conducts a site visit to examine both the product and production processes. In addition, product samples are tested at a separate laboratory facility. Reports of the inspection and testing procedure, along with the application, are submitted to the Secretariat, which reviews the documents and gives its comments to CCEL. CCEL will either convene a plenary meeting or distribute the application among members to make the final decision. This decision is then approved and announced by NEPA and CSBTS.

Award recipients sign a three-year contract with the CCEL Secretariat, which grants them license to use the CCEL seal of approval, given continued environmental compliance. Compliance is ensured through annual or biannual inspections performed by the local environmental protection agency.

There are fees for the application process, site inspection and product testing, and product approval. In addition, there is an annual license fee for use of the label. This fee is calculated according to a matrix incorporating product sales, the nature of the product, and manufacturer size. Such scaling helps make the label accessible to large and small manufacturers alike.

### **Program Methodology**

Selection of product categories is based on several factors that reflect the program's goal of reducing environmental degradation. The program gives preference to products that have traditionally had significant environmental impact and for which advances in the manufacturing process can bring about the reduction of such impact. In addition, products must be closely related to people's daily lives. This condition exists for two reasons: first, the widespread exposure of frequently-used products helps to raise consumer awareness of environmental impact; second, even small reductions in the purchase of widely-used products can result in a large reduction in environmental impact. Low-toxic, low-emission, and energy-saving products that themselves stimulate the development of new technology and new products are favored, as well as products that are covered by foreign environmental labeling programs or contribute to global environmental protection.

CCEL consults other environmental labeling programs in the setting of its own product criteria. Product criteria are formulated to reflect four major considerations. First, products must meet all applicable quality, safety, and hygiene standards, as stated by law. Second, labeled products must minimize their potential environmental impact. Third, the criteria should reflect both the local conditions in China. Finally, the criteria should be easily understood by the average consumer.

## References

"*ECOLABELING: Its Implications for China.*" [Online report]. URL:  
<http://iisd1.iisd.ca/trade/cciced/ecochina.htm>

Heinke, Gary W. et al., *Final Report: Development of an Eco-label Certification Programme for Hong Kong/ RC96-19*. Hong Kong: Research Centre of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, June 1996.

## Product Categories

*Final Categories (as of December 1994)*

- Domestic freezing appliances
- Gas dispersed products
- Degradable film
- Lead-free automobile petroleum
- Water-based paint
- Toilet paper
- Silks
- Mercury-free, cadmium-free, and lead-free rechargeable batteries

